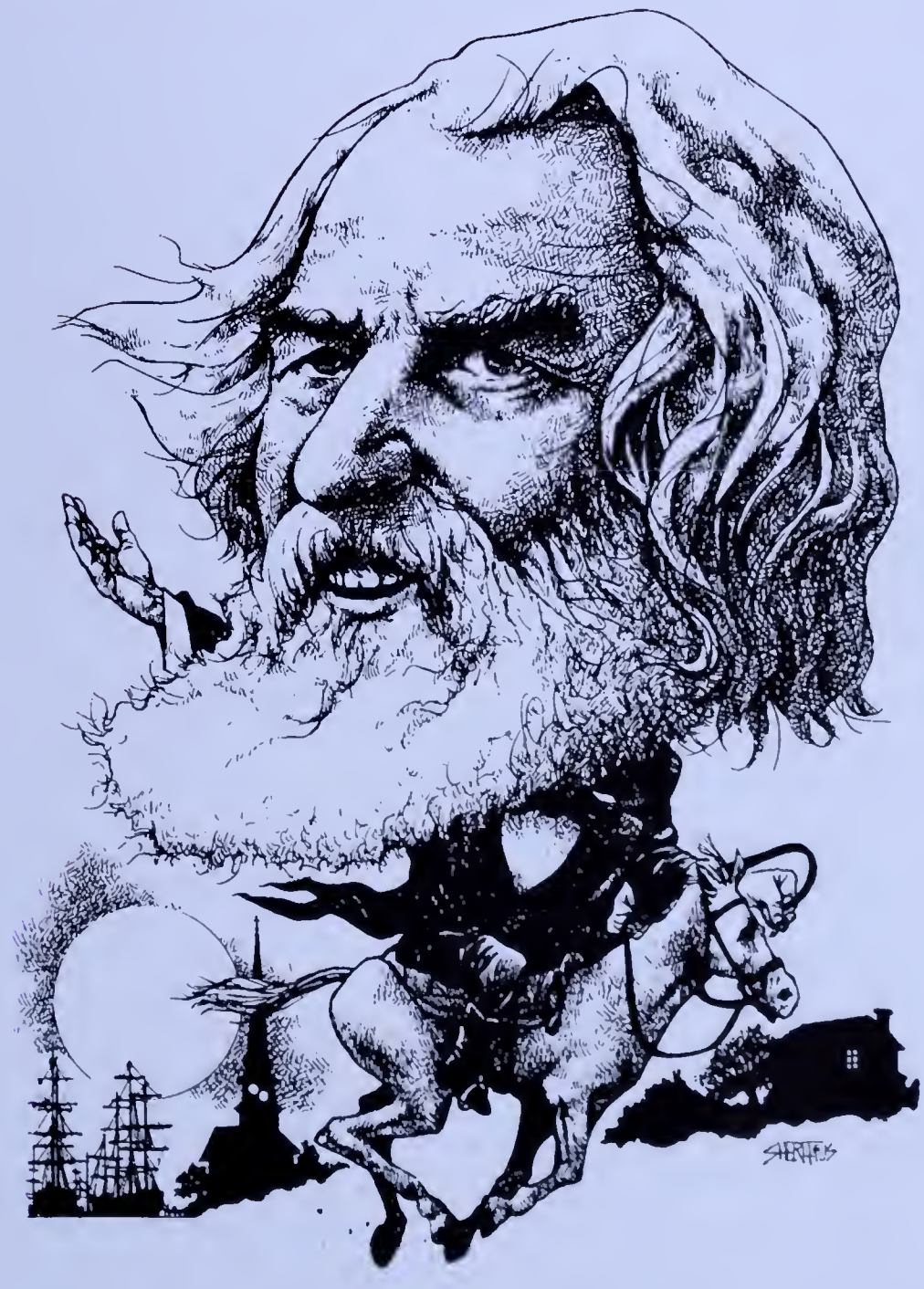
National Endowment for the Arts

THE BIG READ

TEACHER'S GUIDE



POETRY FOUNDATION

THE POETRY OF

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE ARTS

THE BIG READ

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Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

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NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS
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The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine, is an independent literary organization committed to a vigorous presence for poetry in our culture. It has embarked on an ambitious plan to bring the best poetry before the largest possible audiences.

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Aftermath

When the summer fields are mown,
When the birds are fledged and flown,
  And the dry leaves strew the path;
With the falling of the snow,
With the cawing of the crow,
Once again the fields we mow
  And gather in the aftermath.

Not the sweet, new grass with flowers
Is this harvesting of ours;
  Not the upland clover bloom;
But the rowen mixed with weeds,
Tangled tufts from marsh and meads,
Where the poppy drops its seeds
  In the silence and the gloom.

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

Introduction

Welcome to The Big Read, an initiative from the National Endowment for the Arts. Designed to revitalize the role of literary reading in American culture, The Big Read hopes to unite communities through great literature, as well as inspire students to become lifelong readers.

It is especially appropriate The Big Read includes poetry for the first time by honoring Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, one of America's foremost and best-loved nineteenth-century poets. The National Endowment for the Arts joins the Poetry Foundation to create this new program to celebrate great American poets and the historic sites associated with their lives and works. By celebrating poets and their literary landmarks, the NEA and the Poetry Foundation not only bring poetry to a broader audience, but also help preserve and promote local heritage and history.

This Teacher's Guide contains ten lessons to lead you through Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poetry. Longfellow was not only a major American poet, but he was also one of the most influential figures in our national cultural history. In unforgettable poetic language that appealed to millions of readers across all classes, he helped create many of the songs, stories, characters, and images by which the young United States knew itself.

Each lesson has five components: a focus topic, discussion activities, writing exercises, vocabulary words, and homework assignments. In addition, we have suggested essay topics, as well as handouts with more background information about the poems, the historical period, and the author. All lessons dovetail with the state language arts standards required in the poetry genre.

Finally, The Big Read Reader's Guide deepens your exploration with booklists, timelines, and historical information. We hope these educational materials allow you to have fun with your students while introducing them to the work of a great American poet.

From the NEA and Poetry Foundation, we wish you an exciting and productive school year.

Dana Gioia
Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts

John Barr
President
Poetry Foundation

Suggested Teaching Schedule

1

Day One

FOCUS: Word Choice and the Value of a Dictionary

Activities: Discuss the careful, studied choices poets make when selecting words and the value of understanding a word's various meanings. Look up words in the poem "Aftermath." Write an essay explaining the poem's literal and symbolic meanings.

Homework: From the Reader's Guide, read Longfellow's biography and timeline (pp. 4–6) and "Longfellow's Ballads and Lyric Poetry" (pp. 8–9). Read Longfellow's sonnet "Mezzo Cammin."

2

Day Two

FOCUS: Biographical Criticism and the Speaker of a Poem

Activities: Discuss the ways an understanding of Longfellow's life enriches the reader's appreciation of the poem, "Mezzo Cammin." Write an essay reflecting on how these biographical details help us understand the poem's imagery and themes.

Homework: Read Longfellow's sonnet "The Cross of Snow."

Longfellow's poems are in the public domain, and free to print from the Poetry Foundation's web site: **www.poetryfoundation.org.** Go to the Poetry Tool, and search by the poet's name or each poem's title.

3

Day Three

FOCUS: The Sonnet

Activities: Discuss the structure of an Italian sonnet compared to that of an English sonnet. Write an essay on how the sonnet form adds meaning to "The Cross of Snow," or have students re-write the poem using another poetic form.

Homework: Read Reader's Guide essays "Introduction to Longfellow's Poetry" (p. 3) and "Longfellow and Other Arts" (p. 14). Read "The Children's Hour" and "The Bells of San Blas."

4

Day Four

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Activities: Discuss ways Longfellow employs simile, metaphor, and personification. List the words in "The Children's Hour" associated with a castle invasion. Write two paragraphs on how a full understanding of the poem depends on the reader noticing both its literal and figurative qualities.

Homework: Read "A Psalm of Life" and "The Wreck of the Hesperus."

5

Day Five

FOCUS: Form, Rhythm, and Meter

Activities: Discuss form and meter. Practice scansion. Write an essay that examines contemporary songs and how they employ meter, rhyme, and rhythm.

Homework: Read "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" and "My Lost Youth."

6

Day Six

FOCUS: Allusions

Activities: Examine important allusions in Longfellow's poetry. Write an essay on how knowledge of Longfellow's allusions can change the reader's understanding of "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport."

Homework: Read *Evangeline*'s prologue and Part the First. List the characters and some of their important traits.

7

Day Seven

FOCUS: Narrative Poetry, Meter, and Voice

Activities: Discuss the tradition of narrative poetry. Examine unrhymed dactylic hexameter and scan several lines of the prologue to *Evangeline*. Write a short essay on Longfellow's use of the narrative form.

Homework: Read *Evangeline*, Part the Second and Handout One, "Longfellow and Multiculturalism." Trace Evangeline's journey across America.

8

Day Eight

FOCUS: Narrative Poetry and Characters

Activities: Discuss Evangeline's quest to find Gabriel. In groups, discuss the places Evangeline travels and how these places influence the reader's understanding of the poem. Write an essay on Evangeline's character.

Homework: Read the Reader's Guide essay "Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*" (pp. 12–13) and Handout Two, "*The Landlord's Tale*: 'Paul Revere's Ride'." Read the prelude to *Tales of a Wayside Inn*; *The Landlord's Tale*, "Paul Revere's Ride;" and *The Poet's Tale*, "The Birds of Killingworth."

9

Day Nine

FOCUS: Analyzing a Poem's Context

Activities: Discuss the historical and social context of "Paul Revere's Ride." Write a short essay on how the bird in "The Birds of Killingworth" might be historically significant and symbolic.

Homework: Read the Finale of *Tales of a Wayside Inn.*

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Day Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Great Poet?

Activities: Explore the qualities of a great poet. Discuss what Longfellow's poetry can teach us about the concerns of his generation. Write an essay illustrating a central theme in Longfellow's poetry.

Homework: Read Handout Three, "Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*." Write a paragraph about Longfellow's legacy in the twenty-first century.

Lesson One

FOCUS: Word Choice and the Value of a Dictionary

Begin each day's lesson by reading the poem aloud in class.

Before a poem can be appreciated for its deeper meanings, it must first be read literally. We often overlook words we can already define. Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote in *Nature*, "Every word…if traced to its root, is found to be borrowed from some material appearance. *Right* means *straight*; *wrong* means *twisted. Spirit* primarily means *wind*; *transgression,* the crossing of a *line; supercilious,* the *raising of the eyebrow.*" Students should even look up words that are commonly understood to understand better the careful, conscious choices poets make. To develop your students' vocabulary, several words from each lesson's assigned poems are already defined in the color margins of this Teacher's Guide.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Aftermath":

Aftermath, *n.*
1. A consequence, especially of a disaster
2. A second growth in the same season

Fledged, *v. intr.*
To grow the plumage needed for flight

Rowen, *n.*
A second growth of grass or hay in a season

Tufts , *n. plural*
A short cluster of elongated strands, as of yarn, hair, or grass

Mead, *n.*
A meadow

Discussion Activities

On the surface, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem "Aftermath," published in 1873, might seem simple and straightforward. However, much of its total effect depends on a reader's knowing the literal—and in some cases, archaic—meanings of a few words. Here, the most crucial word to understand is the title. Like many seemingly abstract words, *aftermath* was originally a concrete descriptive term that referred to the usually meager second growth of crop in a field that had already been mowed that season—"math" being a word for mowing that is rarely used today.

The poem "Aftermath" describes this activity of mowing the second growth in a winter field, but Longfellow's treatment suggests symbolic interpretations as well. He does not specify this subtext, so a reader can project his or her own meaning into the poem. Longfellow's insight, though, is painfully clear: to revisit a scene of the past can be devastating.

Define and discuss the meanings of several words in "Aftermath" (including, but not limited to, the words in the column on the left). How does knowing the exact meaning of these words add to both your literal and symbolic readings of Longfellow's poem?

Writing Exercise

After reading the poem once, write a one-page essay explaining the poem's meaning. Read the poem a second time with a focus on understanding the meaning of one or two terms in the poem. Write a one-page essay to explain how those terms are relevant to the meaning of the poem. Does it change your first reading? Does it deepen your understanding of the poem?

Homework

From the Reader's Guide, read Longfellow's biography and timeline (pp. 4–6) and "Longfellow's Ballads and Lyric Poetry" (pp. 8–9). Then read Longfellow's sonnet "Mezzo Cammin."

Some of this lesson's content is taken from *An Introduction to Poetry*, eds. X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, 11th edition, and its accompanying instructor's manual.

2

Lesson Two

FOCUS: Biographical Criticism and the Speaker of a Poem

Examining an author's life can inform and expand a literary text. Biographical criticism is the practice of analyzing a literary work through the lens of an author's experience. Some poems depend on a reader's knowledge of biographical facts. However, readers should be careful not to assume that the speaker of a poem is necessarily the poet. When we read a poem, one of our first questions should be: whose "voice" is speaking to us? Sometimes a poet will create a *persona*, a fictitious speaker. This speaker may not always be human. A speaker may be an animal or object, and good poems have been written from perspectives as various as a hawk, a clock, or a cloud.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Mezzo Cammin":

Parapet, *n.*
1. A low protective wall along the edge of a raised structure
2. An earthen embankment protecting soldiers

Indolence, *n.*
Habitual laziness; sloth

Blast, *n.*
1. A very strong gust of wind
2. A violent explosion
3. A sudden, loud sound

Cataract, *n.*
1. A descent of water over a steep surface; a waterfall
2. Any furious rush of water

Discussion Activities

Longfellow's sonnet "Mezzo Cammin"—a poem he wrote at age 35 but never published during his lifetime—is especially suited to biographical criticism. In the opening lines, the poet laments that he has not fulfilled "the aspiration of [his] youth"—which, for Longfellow, was nothing less than to create verse that would become as immortal as Shakespeare's. The second quatrain explains this failed ambition was not because of "indolence," a pursuit of "pleasure," or "the fret / Of restless passions," but because of "sorrow, and a care that almost killed."

The key biographical question of the sonnet is: What caused this sorrow? At the beginning of 1835, Longfellow had just received a desirable new professorship at Harvard, and his beloved wife, Mary, was expecting their first child. Together they traveled to Scandinavia and Holland, where he studied Swedish, Finnish, Old Icelandic, and Dutch. But on this trip, Mary suffered a miscarriage, and a resulting infection led to her death. Longfellow was devastated. Several months later, he wrote in a letter: "I have a void in my heart—a constant feeling of sorrow and bereavement, and utter loneliness."

Writing Exercise

Examine the last six lines. Write a paragraph answer for each question: Why might Longfellow capitalize "Past," comparing it to a city? How does he describe this city? Does this city relate to Longfellow's life? What does Longfellow suggest by closing his sonnet with the strong image of Death "thundering from the heights"? Conclude with one paragraph on how biographical details shed insight on poems, using Longfellow as an example.

Homework

Read Longfellow's sonnet "The Cross of Snow." What is the cross on his breast, and what does it have to do with "the face of one long dead"?

3

Lesson Three

FOCUS: The Sonnet

In the poetry of western Europe and America, the sonnet has attracted more noteworthy poets than any other fixed form. A sonnet is a fourteen-lined poem with a prescribed rhyme scheme and specific structure. Originally an Italian form (*sonnetto*: "little song"), the sonnet owes much of its prestige to Petrarch (1304–1374), who often wrote about his love for the unattainable Laura. Soon after English poets imported the sonnet in the middle of the sixteenth century, they worked out their own rhyme scheme—one easier for them to follow than Petrarch's—often called the English, or Shakespearean, sonnet.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "The Cross of Snow":

Martyrdom, *n.*
Extreme suffering for a cause

Repose, *n.*
A state of restfulness

Benedight, *adj.*
Blessed

Discussion Activities

A posthumously published sonnet, "The Cross of Snow" centers upon a beloved woman who has died. One might assume this sonnet refers to the death of Longfellow's first wife—as "Mezzo Cammin" does—except for two phrases: "here in this room she died" and "these eighteen years." Mary died in a hotel in Holland, but his second wife and the mother of their six children, Fanny Appleton, died from a fire in their Massachusetts home, Craigie House, in 1861. Longfellow's failed attempt to save Fanny, as well as her horrific death, absolutely incapacitated him. He wrote "The Cross of Snow" on July 10, 1879, exactly 18 years after her death. The poet never remarried, and remained devoted to poetry and to their five children (one daughter died as an infant) until the end of his life in 1882.

"Mezzo Cammin" and "The Cross of Snow" are both Italian sonnets, also known as Petrarchan sonnets. This kind of sonnet follows the rhyme scheme *a b b a, a b b a* in the octave, or first eight lines. The sestet, or last six lines, adds new rhyme sounds in various patterns. It may rhyme *c d c d c d, c d e c d e, c d c c d c* or in almost any other variation that doesn't end in a couplet. This two-part organization helps the poet organize the poem's argument or ideas. For example, the octave will often state the problem, and the sestet may offer a resolution. Often a turn comes in line 9 that may or may not be solved by line 14. Ask your students to identify each sonnet's turn. This is one way to trace a sonnet's main idea as it moves through the octave to the sestet.

Writing Exercise

Write a one-page essay on how the sonnet form lends meaning to the poem "The Cross of Snow." Or, if you have covered other poetic forms in your class, have students re-write the poem using another poetic form. Does this allow students to understand the ideal use of the sonnet form? Why or why not?

Homework

Read "Introduction to Longfellow's Poetry" (p. 3) and "Longfellow and Other Arts" (pp. 14–15) from the Reader's Guide. Then read two of Longfellow's ballads, "The Children's Hour" and "The Bells of San Blas." Pay attention to each poem's literal meanings.

4

Lesson Four

FOCUS: Figurative Language

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "The Children's Hour":

Turret, *n.*
1. A tower-shaped projection on a building
2. A tall wooden structure mounted on wheels used in ancient warfare to scale an enemy fortress

Banditti, *n. plural*
Robbers, especially members of a gang

Moulder, *v. variant of molder*
To turn to dust by natural decay

From "The Bells of San Blas":

Manifold, *adj.*
1. Many and varied; of many kinds
2. Having many features or forms

Austere, *adj.*
1. Severe in disposition
2. Strict in discipline

Fervid, *adj.*
1. Marked by great passion
2. Extremely hot

Poets use figurative language to help the reader visualize and experience the events and emotions described in the poem. Imagery, a word or series of words that refers to any sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, touch, or taste), helps create a visceral experience for the reader. Some figurative language asks us to stretch our imaginations, finding the likeness in seemingly unrelated things. A simile is a comparison between two things that initially seem quite different, but are shown to have a significant resemblance. Similes employ a connective, usually "like," "as," or "than," or a verb such as "resembles." A metaphor states that one thing is something else in order to extend and expand the meaning of one of those objects. By asserting that a thing is something else, metaphors create a close association that underscores some important similarity. Personification is a figure of speech in which a thing, an animal, or an abstract term (truth, death, the past) takes on human qualities.

Discussion Activities

"The Bells of San Blas" was the last poem Longfellow wrote, only a few weeks before he died in 1882. When the poet lived in Spain for nine months in 1827, he became reasonably fluent in Spanish. He never returned to Spain, nor did he ever travel to Mexico, the location of this final poem. Titled after a small fishing village, San Blas lies on the Pacific Coast between Puerto Vallarta and Mazatlán.

The bells in this poem are certainly literal, singing a "strange, wild melody." But what might Longfellow mean when he says they "are something more than a name"? How might the bells also be interpreted as a metaphor for the past? Summarize each stanza of this poem as a class, noticing each image, metaphor, simile, or use of personification. As a class, identify several possible interpretations of the poem's final lines: "The Past is deaf to your prayer; / Out of the shadows of night / The world rolls into light; / It is daybreak everywhere."

Writing Exercise

The playful ballad "The Children's Hour" expresses Longfellow's affection for his three young daughters: Alice, Anne Allegra, and Edith. At what point in the poem does Longfellow begin to compare his study to a castle wall and his children to "banditti" who invade his territory? List all the words in the poem associated with a castle invasion. Write two paragraphs that explain how a full appreciation of the poem depends on noticing both its literal and figurative qualities.

Homework

Read "A Psalm of Life" and "The Wreck of the Hesperus." Pay attention to the tone and message of "A Psalm of Life." Summarize the plot of the dramatic story told in "The Wreck of the Hesperus." How might the father be held responsible for his daughter's death?

5

Lesson Five

FOCUS: Form, Rhythm, and Meter

Poems may be written in *fixed forms*—traditional verse forms that require certain predetermined structural elements of *meter, rhythm*, and *rhyme*, such as a sonnet (Lesson Three) or a *ballad*. Not all poets write in form or meter, but all poets employ rhythm. *Scansion* is the art of listening carefully to the sounds of a poem and trying to make sense of it. This includes paying attention to each poetic foot, each *stressed* or unstressed syllable, and—if applicable—the poem's *rhyme scheme*. Most nineteenth-century poets, including Longfellow, wrote primarily in fixed forms with identifiable meters. Originally an oral verse form, ballads are often dramatic in their subject matter and compressed in their narrative style.

Discussion Activities

When writing a ballad, a poet may employ many metrical variations and patterns of rhyme. Ask students to compare the meter and rhyme of two ballads: "A Psalm of Life" and "The Wreck of the Hesperus." In groups, ask students to scan one whole poem, noting each line's stressed and unstressed syllables. How does scanning a poem help students understand its meaning, especially where a poet wishes to place emphasis?

When scanning a poem, use an accent (´) over each stressed syllable and a breve, or "little round cup" (˘), over each unstressed syllable. Here are two examples:

Tell me not, in mournful numbers, a
Life is but an empty dream!— b
—from "A Psalm of Life"

It was the schooner Hesperus, a
That sailed the wintry sea; b
And the skipper had taken his little daughter, c
To bear him company. b
—from "The Wreck of the Hesperus"

Writing Exercise

Consider contemporary songs that you know. By scanning your favorite lines explain how the writer employs meter, rhyme, and rhythm and explain how and why the chosen rhythms might make the songs more effective.

Homework

Read "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" and "My Lost Youth." Look up at least three words and try to find a definition that makes sense in light of the poem's context.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "A Psalm of Life":

Bivouac, *n.*
A temporary encampment

Sublime, *adj.*
1. Of high spiritual, moral, or intellectual worth
2. Awe-inspiring

Main, *n.*
The open ocean; high sea

From "The Wreck of the Hesperus":

Schooner, *n.*
A fore-and-aft rigged sailing vessel having at least two masts, the foremast of which is smallest

Helm, *n.*
The steering gear of a ship

Brine, *n.*
1. The water of a sea or ocean
2. A large body of salt water

Smote, *v. past tense of "smite"*
1. To inflict a heavy blow on
2. To afflict retributively

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Lesson Six

FOCUS: Allusions

Poems will often make reference to a person, place, or thing that might be unfamiliar or seem out of place at first. These *allusions* are often brief, sometimes indirect, references that imply a shared set of knowledge between the poet and the reader. They may appear in a poem as an initial quotation, a passing mention of a name, or a phrase borrowed from another writer—often carrying the meanings and implications of the original. For example, in "The Children's Hour," the "Bishop of Bingen" is an allusion to a German legend.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport":

Sepulchral, *adj.*
Of or relating to a burial vault

Mirk, *n. archaic spelling of "murk"*
Darkness or gloom

Anathema, *n.*
A vehement denunciation

Maranatha, *n. Aramaic*
An invocation meaning, "O Lord, Come!"

Travail, *n.*
Tribulation or agony; anguish

From "My Lost Youth":

Wharves, *n. plural of "wharf"*
A landing place where ships may tie up

Slips, *n. plural*
A docking place for a ship between two piers

Bulwarks, *n. plural*
A wall or embankment raised as a defensive fortification

Pallor, *n.*
Unnatural paleness

Discussion Activities

Longfellow's ballad "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" contains so many allusions that a student might be tempted to give up. Most of the allusions refer to Judaism, the Hebrew language, or Old Testament stories or names. Read the poem out loud. Break up your class into four groups, asking each to research the highlighted allusions in one of the stanzas indicated below. Then ask each group to report its discoveries to the whole class. In light of these literary allusions, what is the significance of the poem's final stanza?

"...the **tablets of the Law,** thrown down / And **broken by Moses** at the **mountain's base**." (stanza 3)

"What persecution, merciless and blind, / Drove o'er the sea—that desert desolate— / These **Ishmaels** and Hagars of mankind?" (stanza 8)

"All their lives long, with the **unleavened bread** / And **bitter herbs of exile** and its fears, / The wasting **famine** of the heart they fed, / And slaked its **thirst** with **marah of their tears**." (stanza 10)

"At every **gate** the **accursed Mordecai** / Was mocked and jeered, and **spurned by Christian feet.**" (stanza 11)

Writing Exercise

Using the collective research on the allusions in "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport," write a short essay on how Longfellow's allusions broaden the meaning of the poem. Be specific by explaining how the meaning has changed with your new research. To focus this essay, do further research on one allusion and describe how that allusion contributes to our understanding of the poem.

As an alternative, compare how allusions function in "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport" and "My Lost Youth." Does Longfellow use allusions to equal effect in both poems? Why or why not?

Homework

Read *Evangeline*'s prologue and Part the First (approximately 30 pages). Make a list of the poem's characters and their most important character traits.

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Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Narrative Poetry, Meter, and Voice

Narrative poems tell stories, draw characters and settings, shape plots, and engage the reader—qualities that are also important for fiction writers. In Western literature, narrative poetry dates back to the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (composed about 2000 B.C.) and Homer's epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (composed before 700 B.C.).

Longfellow's four book-length poems—*Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (1847), *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), *The Courtship of Miles Standish* (1858), and *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863–73)—established his status as a major poet. These narrative poems tell the untold story of a new nation, in memorable lines of emotional power and vivid drama.

VOCABULARY WORDS

From the prologue of Evangeline:

Primeval, *adj.*
Having existed from the beginning; in the earliest state

Druids, *n.*
A member of an order of priests in the ancient Celtic religion who appear in legend as prophets and sorcerers

Disconsolate, *adj.*
Seeming beyond consolation

Roe, *n.*
A type of deer

List, *v.*
Archaic: listen, listen to

Discussion Activities

Read the Reader's Guide essay on *Evangeline* aloud with your class (pages 10–11). The end of this essay notes that *Evangeline* is an extraordinary piece of literary experimentation because of its meter: unrhymed *dactylic hexameter* (see glossary). For about 500 years, English-language poets had been trying to make this meter work in English—the ancient meter in which Homer (Greek) and Virgil (Latin) wrote. Notice the scansion of *Evangeline*'s opening lines:

This is the | forest pri|meval. The | murmuring | pines and the | hemlocks,
Bearded with | moss, and in | garments green,| indistinct | in the twilight…

In groups, ask your students to scan several lines from the prologue, paying attention to the sounds and words that Longfellow emphasizes.

Writing Exercise

Narrated by the "murmuring pines and the hemlocks" and the ocean waves, the poem opens with a mystery: where are the people in this seemingly idyllic place called Acadie? Write a short essay to explain how Longfellow utilizes narrative form to tell this story. Why might Longfellow begin his poem with the cry of the forest? What effect does this have on the reader? What does this story convey about America?

Homework

Read *Evangeline*, Part the Second (approximately 30 pages). Trace Evangeline's journey across America as she searches for her beloved fiancé, Gabriel. Map the specific places across America where she travels. Then read Handout One, "Longfellow and Multiculturalism," in this guide.

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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: Narrative Poetry and Characters

VOCABULARY WORDS

From Evangeline *Part the Second, Section 1:*

Dirge, *n.*
A funeral hymn

Sylvan, *adj.*
Relating to woods or forests

Cultural and historical contexts give rise to dilemmas and themes that can act as powerful forces within a literary work. Studying and appreciating the details of setting can help readers understand a character's motivations. The central character in a work of fiction is called the *protagonist*. The protagonist usually initiates the main action of the story and often overcomes a flaw such as weakness or ignorance to achieve new understanding by the work's end. The protagonist's journey is enriched by encounters with characters with different goals, motives, or beliefs. Often the *antagonist* opposes the protagonist, barring or complicating his or her progress.

As a character, Evangeline seems like someone out of a myth or fable. She is certainly Longfellow's ideal of a patient, virtuous woman. In a century of literature that usually featured a heroic male protagonist, Evangeline's strength and determination cannot be underestimated: she searches for her beloved Gabriel, and she chooses to hope for his return.

Discussion Activities

Most of the poem describes Evangeline's search for Gabriel, which takes her all over America: down the Mississippi River, across the Nebraskan prairie, into the Ozark Mountains, through the forests of Michigan, and finally to Louisiana. Break your class into groups, asking each to highlight one state or place where Evangeline travels. Does the country itself become a character? Students should pay attention to Longfellow's use of figurative language in these passages. You might give students a blank U.S. map to enhance their understanding of her vast journey.

Writing Exercise

Write a short essay to describe Evangeline's character. Answer the following questions: What aspects of Evangeline's character seem unrealistic? Does she have any flaws? What admirable qualities does she possess? What are her motivations? Does she learn anything, or grow, by the poem's end? Use specific passages to support your answer.

Homework

Read the Reader's Guide essay "Longfellow's *Tales of a Wayside Inn*" (pp. 12–13) and Handout Two, "*The Landlord's Tale*: 'Paul Revere's Ride'." Also read the prelude to *Tales of a Wayside Inn* and summarize the key attributes of each storyteller. Then read *The Landlord's Tale*, "Paul Revere's Ride" and *The Poet's Tale*, "The Birds of Killingworth."

Lesson Nine

FOCUS: Analyzing a Poem's Context

VOCABULARY WORDS

From "Paul Revere's Ride":

Belfry, *n.*
A bell tower

Muster, *n.*
A gathering of troops

Sentinel, *n.*
One that keeps guard

Alders, *n.*
A type of tree of the genus *Alnus* having alternate simple toothed leaves and tiny fruits in woody, conelike catkins

Tales of a Wayside Inn was published in three installments between 1863 and 1873. It is often said that the poem is an American retelling of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. This long narrative poem begins with a prelude that introduces a diverse group of storytellers—a Sicilian political refugee, a Spanish Jew, a Norwegian musician, a youthful student, a broad-minded theologian, and a tender-hearted poet. It comprises twenty-two linked narratives with great variety of theme, meter, and tone. Longfellow's tales are diverse also in subject matter, character, and historical reference. The interludes between each story provide commentary from the other listeners. In this way, the longer poem suggests that the stories we tell are reflections of our own thoughts, dreams, and desires.

Discussion Activities

Read "Paul Revere's Ride" and the interlude that follows aloud with your class. Ask your students to pay attention to the meter's galloping beat.

Longfellow would not have called himself a political man, but he abhorred slavery and opposed the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law. He was a lifelong friend of lawyer Charles Sumner, the congressman who was physically attacked on the Senate floor by South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks after giving an anti-slavery speech.

Discuss the importance of interpreting this poem's historical context (April 18, 1775) alongside its 1861 publication in *The Atlantic Monthly*. Use this opportunity to teach your students some details about the Civil War. What ideas or lines in "Paul Revere's Ride" suggest that Longfellow might be referring to the Civil War? Why might he have set his poem during this earlier period? How might this either enhance or hinder any point he might be trying to make about the Civil War?

Writing Exercise

The only original tale in *Tales of a Wayside Inn* is titled "The Birds of Killingworth." Certainly the birds are literal in the story, but there may be several figurative interpretations as well. Write a short essay on how Longfellow's use of birds might be related to his historical context. What might the birds represent? How might Longfellow's original audience have interpreted the birds? How might we today?

Homework

Read the Finale of *Tales of a Wayside Inn*.

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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Great Poet?

Poets articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives in the context of the human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of figurative language inform the themes and characters of the work. A great poem is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to list the characteristics of a great poem. Put these on the board. What elevates a poem to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other poems or songs they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these works remind them of any of Longfellow's poetry?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. Does Longfellow have a consistent voice throughout the poems you have studied? (Make sure to draw a distinction between the voice of the poem's narrator and Longfellow's voice.) What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of Longfellow's generation? How does Longfellow's depiction of the experiences and emotions of the common person allow him to be a voice of his generation?

Writing Exercise

These ten lessons have highlighted several different kinds of Longfellow poems: lyric poems, sonnets, ballads, and narrative poems. Using more than two Longfellow poems to support your argument, write a short essay to illustrate how a central theme emerges in Longfellow's work. Explain the theme in detail, referring to specific lines to support your argument. Which poem illustrates the theme most effectively and why?

Homework

Read Handout Three, "Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*". Write a paragraph in response to this question: What would you say is Longfellow's legacy in the twenty-first century?

Essay Topics

The writing exercises in this guide provide you with possible essay topics, as do the six Discussion Questions in the Reader's Guide. Advanced students can come up with their own essay topics, as long as they are interesting and specific. Other ideas for essays are provided below.

For essays, students should organize their ideas around a thesis—that is, an argument or interpretation—about the poem or poems in question. This statement or thesis should be focused, with clear reasons to support its conclusion. The thesis and supporting evidence should be backed by references to the text.

1. Some of Longfellow's poetry contains allusions to his life, but Longfellow remained skeptical of poetry as a vehicle for self-revelation and of poems written in first-person. In a letter, he once called "I" the "objectionable pronoun." Explain why Longfellow might make this statement. In your essay, determine whether Longfellow's poems are or are not biographical. If you believe they are biographical, explain how Longfellow might defend his statement.

2. The sonnets "Mezzo Cammin" and "The Cross of Snow" end with images of darkness and ambiguity—atypical characteristics for Longfellow's poetry. In "Mezzo Cammin," how does the image of a journey convey the poem's main idea? In "The Cross of Snow," how does the image of a cross convey his lasting anguish? Using these examples, explain how images enhance meaning.

3. *Evangeline* tells the true story of a dispossessed people. Biographer Charles C. Calhoun suggests that the reunion between Evangeline and Gabriel "stands for the bringing together of all the scattered Acadians—indeed, of all exiled peoples." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? How relevant does *Evangeline* remain when compared with twentieth- and twenty-first century examples of racial and religious persecution? Support your twentieth- and twenty-first century examples by citing research and valid sources.

4. The poet W.H. Auden said that "poetry makes nothing happen." Research the popularity, historic significance, and lasting cultural impact of Longfellow's narrative poem *Evangeline*. In the case of Longfellow's *Evangeline*, is Auden's idea proved false? How important are the Evangeline statues in Nova Scotia and Louisiana? Use your answers to write an essay about Longfellow's influence on culture and history.

5. Longfellow biographer Charles C. Calhoun describes "The Birds of Killingworth" as "one of Longfellow's most Unitarian works" because "its satire on Connecticut religious orthodoxy still had considerable bite in the 1860s, despite its colonial setting." Consider the poem's religious context. Is Longfellow making fun of, supporting, or arguing with the clergy in this tale?

Glossary

A glossary of some of the poetic terms used in the lessons is listed below.*

Allusion: A brief, sometimes indirect reference in a text to a person, place, or thing

Antagonist: A character or force in a work of fiction that opposes the protagonist and tries to bar or complicate his or her progress

Ballads: Narrative poems that may be sung. Originally an oral verse form, ballads were traditionally passed from performer to performer without being written down.

Dactyl: A metrical foot of verse in which one stressed syllable is followed by two unstressed syllables (e.g., tur-bu-lent or Ga-bri-el). It often appears in children's songs and nursery rhymes, as in "Hickory dickory dock." *Evangeline* is an example of a poem written in dactylic hexameter.

Fixed forms: A traditional verse form that requires certain predetermined structural elements of meter, rhythm, and rhyme, such as a sonnet or a ballad

Foot: The basic unit of measurement in poetry. Different meters are identified by the pattern and order of stressed and unstressed syllables in its foot. A foot can be two or three syllables, depending on the meter.

Hexameter: A verse meter consisting of six metrical feet, or six primary stresses, per line

Meter: A systematic rhythmic pattern of stresses in verse

Persona: A fictitious speaker created by the poet

Protagonist: The central character in a work of fiction who usually initiates the main action of the story and often overcomes a flaw such as weakness or ignorance to achieve new understanding by the work's end

Quatrain: A stanza consisting of four lines of verse

Rhythm: The pattern of stresses and pauses in a poem

Rhyme scheme: The pattern of rhyme in an individual poem or a fixed form, a rhyme scheme is transcribed with small letters representing each end rhyme—*a* for the first rhyme, *b* for the second, and so on.

Scansion: A method of studying verse that measures rhythms in a poem, scansion separates the metrical feet, counts the syllables, marks the accented ones, and indicates the pauses. Scansion helps the reader understand the poet's handling of rhythm, verse length, and sound.

Stanza: A unit of two or more lines of verse with space breaks before and after, the stanza is poetry's equivalent to a paragraph in prose.

Stress (or accent): A greater amount of force given to one syllable in speaking than is given to another

Tetrameter: A verse meter consisting of four metrical feet, or four primary stresses, per line. *The Song of Hiawatha* is an example of a poem written in trochaic tetrameter.

Trochee: A metrical foot of verse in which one stressed syllable is followed by one unstressed syllable.

*All literary definitions, both here and in the lessons, are taken from *An Introduction to Poetry* (11th edition), edited by X. J. Kennedy and Dana Gioia, or *Handbook of Literary Terms*, edited by X. J. Kennedy, Dana Gioia, and Mark Bauerlein (2005)

Longfellow and Multiculturalism

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow would not have used the word multicultural to describe himself, but there is, perhaps, no other American poet who deserves this adjective more than he.

As a young man studying for his first university position, Longfellow was immersed in European languages and literature, including classic Greek and Latin. But after several long trips to Europe, he realized that America was an extraordinarily diverse country that was being populated by thousands of new immigrants, who brought with them different languages, histories, and religions. Longfellow knew that any account of what it means to be American would have to include these various groups. This sweeping international vision is evident throughout his life's work.

Longfellow began his literary career as a translator of an astonishing range of poetry. He had a deep knowledge of poetic forms, meter, and European literature. His 1839 poetic debut, *Voices of the Night*, announced his mastery of European poetic traditions, as it contained more than twenty translations from Spanish, French, German, and Danish. He could speak and read eight languages, and he could fluently read at least four more. He continued to translate verse until his death, most notably as the first American to translate Dante's *The Divine Comedy*.

What is often overlooked is Longfellow's originality as an anthologist. At a time when reading world literature was not a popular American interest, Longfellow began collecting, editing, and publishing a 31-volume set of poetry called *Poems of Places* (1876–79). In arranging each small volume by country, he created a kind of poetic travelogue. For example, if you wanted to travel to Italy, you had three volumes from which to choose. Places he never went—such as Russia and Africa—got one volume each; even Polynesia and Afghanistan were included. In a radical editorial choice for the nineteenth century, poems by women were included alongside poems by men—rather than appearing in a separate anthology, or, as would have been expected, not appearing at all.

Throughout his narrative poetry, Longfellow explored a wide range of American experiences. With *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), Longfellow became the first writer in English to borrow Native American legends and folklore respectfully. In *Evangeline: A Tale of Acadie* (1847), he remembers—when America had all but forgotten—that the Louisiana Cajuns were once the Acadians from Nova Scotia before the British Empire dispossessed them of their land. And *Tales of a Wayside Inn* (1863–73) comprises a full cast of international characters, including a Norwegian musician, a Spanish Jew, and a Sicilian teacher.

Longfellow's subjects are not Greek gods, medieval knights, or upper-class ladies. In poems such as "The Village Blacksmith," Longfellow portrays ordinary people with dignity. His friend Charles Dickens inspired him to write a collection of abolitionist poems, *Poems on Slavery* (1842), long before the abolitionist movement gained prominence in America. Longfellow is not only part of American literature, he helped craft the narrative of American history.

The Landlord's Tale: "Paul Revere's Ride"

"Paul Revere's Ride" depicts a complicated historical incident embedded in the politics of Revolutionary America and retells it with narrative clarity, emotional power, and masterful pacing. From the poem's first publication, historians have complained that Longfellow distorted the actual incident. But Longfellow's goal was not scholarly precision; he wanted to create a stirring patriotic myth. He took Paul Revere, a regional folk hero hardly known outside Massachusetts, and made him a national icon. The new Revere became the symbolic figure who awakens America to fight for freedom.

Longfellow was a master of narrative pacing. His description of Revere's friend climbing the Old North Church tower displays the poet's ability to make each moment matter. By slowing down the plot here, Longfellow builds suspense and adds evocative physical details that heighten the moods. (Decades later Hollywood would discover the same procedures.) Reaching the belfry, the friend startles "the pigeons from their perch." The man pauses to look down at the church graveyard—an image that prefigures the deadly battle to be fought the next day. This lyric moment of reflection provides a false sense of calm before the explosive action that will follow.

The historical Revere was one of many riders, but Longfellow understood the powerful appeal of the single heroic individual who makes a decisive impact—another narrative lesson not lost on Hollywood. Longfellow's Revere is not a revolutionary organizer; he is a man of action. As soon as he sees the first lantern, he springs into the saddle, though he is smart enough to wait for the second light before he rides off.

Longfellow's galloping triple meters create a thrilling sense of speed, and the rhetorical device of stating the time of night when Revere enters each village adds a cumulative feeling of the rider's urgency. The last two stanzas also demonstrate Longfellow's narrative authority. As the poet makes the sudden but clear transition from Revere's arrival in the town of Concord to the following day's conflict, Longfellow masterfully summarizes the Battle of Concord in only eight lines, and he asks the listener to collaborate in completing the story.

The final stanza returns to the image of Revere riding through the night. By this time, the galloping Revere acquires an overtly symbolic quality. He has become a timeless emblem of American courage and independence. The relevance of this patriotic symbol would not have been lost on Longfellow's original audience in 1861—the mostly New England Yankee readers of the Boston-based *The Atlantic Monthly*. Longfellow mythologizes the Revolutionary War, but his poem addresses a more immediate crisis—the impending break-up of the Union. Published a few months before the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter initiated America's bloodiest war, "Paul Revere's Ride" was Longfellow's reminder to New Englanders of the courage their ancestors demonstrated in forming the Union. The author's intentions were overtly political—to build public resolve to fight slavery and protect the Union—but he embodied his message in a poem compellingly told in purely narrative terms.

Longfellow's *The Song of Hiawatha*

Encouraged by the remarkable success of *Evangeline,* Longfellow set out in the early 1850s to write another long narrative poem. This time he turned to an obvious epic subject for any North American writer—the legends and tales of the Native Americans who had first settled the continent.

Growing up in Maine in the 1820s, Longfellow met some of the few Native Americans who had survived there, and as a Harvard professor he talked with the young Ojibway writer and preacher Kah-ge-ge-gah-bowh (also known as George Copway), who visited Boston in 1849. While Native American languages fascinated Longfellow, his view was similar to many of his white contemporaries: the tribal peoples were a vanishing race soon to disappear or be absorbed into the dominant white society. As a keen student of national epics, he was determined to preserve "the ballads of a people" before they became lost forever.

Longfellow had recently discovered the national epic of Finland, the *Kalevala*, and he borrowed some of its subject matter and its distinctive meter—the famous "tom-tom" beat or, to use the technical term, *trochaic tetrameter*. In his reading about Native Americans in Michigan, the poet was especially intrigued by the Ojibway hero Manabozho, a shaman-trickster figure, whom he reshaped into a more sympathetic and peace-loving hero. Longfellow gave him the name of an Iroquois lawmaker, Hiawatha—a name that would soon be world-famous (though few readers of the poem here or abroad followed Longfellow's suggestion that it should be pronounced "Hee-a-wa-tha").

The 22 cantos, or books, of Hiawatha's song tell the story of the childhood and young adulthood of a god-like hero—strong enough to wrestle monsters and demons, gentle enough to woo and win the beautiful maiden Minnehaha. (Her name, says the poet, means "Laughing Water," and you can still visit "her" waterfall in Minneapolis, Minnesota, today.) Raised by his grandmother Nokomis, the young Hiawatha learns the ways of the world from forest animals, then teaches his own people to plant corn and establish a civilization. Most important, he teaches them picture-writing, so that memory of their accomplishments will never fade.

The final cantos of the poem grow darker and darker. (By 1855—the poem's publication date—Longfellow was deeply troubled with the growing sectional strife over slavery that would soon lead to the Civil War.) Famine strikes Hiawatha's people, Minnehaha dies, and soon the "Black Robes" (Catholic French Canadian priests) appear, marking the end of Hiawatha's culture. He paddles his canoe into the sunset and disappears.

The Song of Hiawatha became instantly famous, eventually the best-selling long poem in American literature. It was a favorite recitation piece for several generations of Americans, and it inspired public festivals, songs, symphonies, cantatas, paintings, cartoons, and commercial advertisements. Also one of the most widely parodied poems in the world, *The Song of Hiawatha* remains one of Longfellow's most memorable and recognizable works.

Teaching Resources

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's Poetry

The most comprehensive collection available of Longfellow's poetry is *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Poems and Other Writings*, edited by J.D. McClatchy, published in hardback by the Library of America (2000). It includes selections from thirteen of Longfellow's collections of poetry, the unabridged *Evangeline* and *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, and a chronology of the poet's life.

Paperback versions of Longfellow's verse include *Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Selected Poems* with an introduction by Lawrence Buell (New York: Penguin, 1988) and *Evangeline and Selected Tales and Poems* with an introduction by Horace Gregory (New York: Signet, 2005).

An unabridged version of *Tales of a Wayside Inn* is published by Longfellow's Wayside Inn (Sudbury, MA: 1995).

Selected Books about Longfellow and His Poetry

Calhoun, Charles C. *Longfellow: A Rediscovered Life*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2004.

Gale, Robert L. *A Henry Wadsworth Longfellow Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2003.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and His Portland Home. Portland, ME: Maine Historical Society, 2004.

Irmscher, Christoph. *Longfellow Redux*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth. *The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*. Ed. Andrew Hilen. 6 vols. Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1966–82.

Web site

Visit the Poetry Tool at www.poetryfoundation.org for a biography and bibliography of Longfellow, along with many of his poems.

Landmarks

There are three American landmarks devoted to Longfellow. Each organization's Web site will provide both teachers and students with additional biographical material, lesson plans, and images.

www.hwlongfellow.org
The Maine Historical Society preserves Longfellow's childhood home in Portland, Maine, now called the Wadsworth-Longfellow House.

www.nps.gov/long
The National Park Service maintains the home Longfellow occupied from 1837 to 1882 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, as the Longfellow National Historic Site.

www.wayside.org
Longfellow's Wayside Inn was originally known as Howe's Tavern. Located in Sudbury, Massachusetts, Longfellow visited the tavern in 1862.

National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Standards*

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
10. Students whose first language is not English make use of their first language to develop competency in the English language arts and to develop understanding of content across the curriculum.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

* This guide was developed with NCTE Standards and State Language Arts Standards in mind. Use these standards to guide and develop your application of the curriculum.

"Nationality is a good thing to a certain extent but universality is better. All that is best in the great poets of all countries is not what is national in them, but what is universal."

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

from his novel *Kavanagh* (1849)

"Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time..."

—HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW
from his poem "A Psalm of Life"

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THE BIG READ

The Big Read is an initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts designed to restore reading to the center of American culture. Longfellow educational materials are made possible through the generous support of the Poetry Foundation.

A great nation deserves great art.

POETRY FOUNDATION

www.NEABigRead.org